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ABSTRACT

True leaders are characterized by the personal virtues of honor, integrity, and devotion, all based on internally derived standards. Our current educational system, however, succeeds in fostering the virtues of conformity to and acceptance of externally derived standards rather than the characteristics of leadership. If excellence is to be attained, educators must exhibit honor and integrity in their devotion to developing honor, integrity, and devotion to excellence in their students. High standards must be set and the effort to achieve high standards must be modeled. The purpose of education should be to help students become their own best teachers and to take control of and responsibility for their own learning. (PGD)

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Education and Leadership: An Obligation and a Challenge

Paper prepared for the Graduate Panel

of the

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by

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"We have, all of us, an impulse to improve ourselves, an impulse toward actualizing more of our potentialities toward self-actualization, or full humanness, or human fulfillment, or whatever term you like. Granted this, then what holds us up? What blocks us?"

Maslow, A.H. (1971) The Farther Reaches of Human Nature. N.Y.: The Viking Press. p.35.

"One who hopes to lead or discover leaders must learn to know his fellow human beings, that he may more easily hear them when they speak.

"If we are to discover leaders in America and train them to lead and not drive, we must begin to listen intently and unceasingly."

Slattery, Margaret (1920). The Highway to Leadership. Boston: The Pilgrim Press. p.35.

Education and Leadership: An Obligation and a Challenge

Education and leadership are two concepts that should go hand in hand in people's thoughts. That they don't is evidenced by the theme of this conference. What is presented here are some thoughts on what makes a leader, some perceptions of education, and what indications for action might be implemented by educators to engender leadership in future generations.

There is a pedigree of certain of the virtues or values that men hold dear; one that is lost in the dark pages of pre-history. These virtues, when grouped in significant clusters and expressed to a visible degree, form what is commonly known as the character of a person. Of the aforementioned virtues, honor, its corollary, integrity and the emotion they engender - devotion, appear to be at the heart of any analysis of leadership.

Leadership itself is a vague term, especially when viewed in terms of its applications. For every endeavor that the mind of man can conceive, we can name a leader. (Why else the enduring popularity of the Guinness books of records?) There are some who say that these people happened to be in the right place at the right time. Maybe that's true. I venture to say that it was their adherence to these

virtues that caused them to arrive in the right place at the right time. Let's look more closely at these three characteristics.

Honor

A sense of honor is in agreement with the moral values of truth and justice. A person has honor to the degree that he manifests morality and courage in all his interactions with his fellow man. As Emerson put it early in our country's history: "Honor is venerable to us because it is no ephemera. It is always ancient virtue. We worship it today because it is not of today. We love it and pay it homage because it is not a trap for our love and homage, but is self-dependent, self-derived, and therefore of an old immaculate pedigree, even if shown in a young person."[1]

This self-dependency arises within the individual and is developed over time through the honorable actions of the individual. A certain determination must be manifest to do the honorable thing in every circumstance and this determination prepares the individual for the occasions that lead to greatness.

Integrity

The qualities of truthfulness and honesty also describe integrity, but the essence of the word goes beyond that. Faith in a person to consistently keep his word, no matter what the

circumstances, provides a foundation for the person imbued with integrity. The concept of integrity comes to be applied to the person who puts forth his best effort to honor his promise in every situation. If the task/request cannot be fulfilled, a person of integrity will admit to it with no excuses, taking full responsibility for the outcome.

This virtue/trait is also self-derived as it is consistency over time that builds one's reputation of integrity and the motivation to do this originates within the self.

Devotion

When a person acts with honor and integrity, an emotional response is engendered known as devotion. Once set upon a course of being, the true leader dedicates all of his effort and will to the accomplishment of that goal. All of his actions will honor that commitment and his dealings with his fellow man will demonstrate his integrity in the pursuit of this final goal. This dedication to a cause outside of one's self is one of the characteristics of a leader with devotion. People perceiving such devotion will themselves become inflamed with the essence of the leader and the attainment of this goal and will lend their support to the leader and his cause.

When these three virtues come together in a person, we find someone who is willing to risk all for the truth of his/her convictions, who will not be swayed by the influence of the world, who will remain steadfast in the face of adversity until the goal they have set for themselves has been reached. Historical references from mythology, folklore, and other legends all describe the traits of honor and integrity and the devotion to them that create greatness in individuals. We continue to recognize this constellation of virtues today as a sign of a true leader. Yet when we look for someone who will stand out from the crowd, who will inspire us with their convictions, their honor, their integrity and devotion: we find a great void.[2] There does not appear to be anyone to whom we can turn in these United States who could measure up to these basic traits. (I recognize that this is an obvious generalization , but I ask you to bear with me.)

The Educational System

The goal of the educational system should be to prepare us for life in the world at large, a life that may challenge us to lead. More and more frequently this system is being criticized for its failure to do just that.

From those outside the educational milieu, the criticism takes the form of indictments hurled at the schools citing lack of

preparation for the "real world", not enough time spent on the "basics", and a need to change the educational process.[3] All too often these critics lack any definite goals that would satisfy them, and offer no strategy for change that would rectify the situation they feel is so intolerable.

Within the educational system, we find educators who feel themselves strapped within a system that insists on teaching the basics while at the same time riding herd over thirty to forty individuals whose only contact with self-discipline and control ended with toilet training. Within such a system, the students who conform the best, who sit quietly and do the worksheets assigned, who know what it means to "line up" and "walk quietly", are the ones who will get passed along and turned out at the end of twelve years ready to face the world. They will know the basics well enough to know that they are paying too much in taxes, that their job is not fulfilling, and that their kids are not learning what they're supposed to at school.[4] Educators throughout the country lament this fact and point to permissive parents, administrative restrictions and overload, the effects of TV, low pay, too many kids, too much material to be covered, too much technology, too rapid change, the falling dollar on the world market, in short, any excuse (including politics and the weather) that the public will accept to explain "Why Johnny can't read."

Most people appear to find security in anonymity and are encouraged and reinforced by the conformity demanded in school.[5] Education, as it exists today, prepares us to fit the mold of the work-a-day world where the need to conform to the pace of a machine (in an industrial setting) or the dictates of policy (in an institutional setting) determine success on the job. This is not enough for the world we are facing today. We must break this cycle of conformity if we are to continue to develop ourselves, our nation, and our world.

In today's society, in the global village, we cannot afford to accept anything less than excellence. Much emphasis is being placed on quality - in the workplace, in materials, in workmanship. This can be achieved through being honorable in the work agreement, exhibiting integrity in production, and being devoted to these quality concepts. This emphasis now needs to be applied to our educational system. What we need is not necessarily a change in our school systems, but rather a change in the emphasis we put on them. To maintain the edge that we like to think we have over the rest of the world as a leading nation with an enviable concept of government and freedoms that give every individual the opportunity to "be all that they can be", we need to develop these qualities of leadership in all of our citizens. (The challenge of education.)

John W. Gardner (1984) presents the case this way; "It is hard for Americans to realize that the survival of the idea for which this nation stands is not inevitable. It may survive if enough Americans care enough. Part of the problem is that many individuals today no longer have a compelling feeling for the mutual dependence of the individual and the group, meaning by group the family, community, and nation."[6] "...The regeneration of values is an endless task. Each generation draws from its inherited tradition those values that give strength and continuity to its common life - and reinterprets them for contemporary application."[7] We must begin to evaluate what values are important to us now, and which will be important through future generations. We must begin to move our thinking away from "What is the minimum competency I will accept for this?" to "What would be the highest goal to strive for?" "Our society cannot achieve greatness unless individuals at many levels of ability accept the need for high standards of performance and strive to achieve those standards within the limits possible for them."[8] It doesn't matter if they achieve them or not. The important fact is the setting of high standards and the striving to achieve them. By modeling this goal-setting, striving-to-achieve approach to life consistently for youth and being faithful in our use of these techniques, we set examples of honor and integrity. It behooves us, as individuals, to begin this process, for, as we have seen, leadership is an individual responsibility.

Maslow (1971) gives us insight into this process through his concept of "wellness" and challenges us all to develop to our fullest potential. "It is certainly possible for most of us to be greater than we are in actuality. We all have unused potentialities or not fully developed ones. It is certainly true that many of us evade our constitutionally suggested vocations (call, destiny, task in life, mission)."[9] If everyone rose to the challenge of self-improvement (moving beyond the "basics" of schooling), this conformity cycle would be broken. The movement out of self-complacency, anonymity, and conformity is the most difficult choice many of our generation will ever have to make. We have to overcome our own conformity schooling before we can hope to show others how to do it. The process itself is not difficult: just be honorable, work with integrity, and be devoted to a goal. By doing this consistently, anyone can be recognized as a leader, a creator of events. With this preparation a person could find himself at the right place at the right time.

We must also realize and accept the fact that not everyone is cut out to be a leader. We can't point and say, "You, you, and you are leaders," and expect it to be so. As Emerson (1954) pointed out to us, "Such souls do not come in troops: oftenest appear solitary, like a general without his command, because those who can understand and uphold such appear rarely, not many, perhaps not one, in a generation. And the memory and tradition of such a leader is preserved in some

strange way by those who only half understand him, until a true disciple comes, who apprehends and interprets every word."[10] We have many examples of those individuals who believed in themselves enough to step up and make statements to the world. (Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori come immediately to mind as fitting this description.) We have many more examples of those who didn't, and they continue to remain nameless.

We must encourage one another to continually develop ourselves, to strive to be extra-ordinary, that we may inspire the up-coming generations entrusted to our care. The whole purpose of teaching, of education, should be to help students become their own best teachers, to take full control over and responsibility for their own learning. When this happens, individual development will begin to transcend the schooling process. "The fullest possible flowering of human potentiality is the business of education. It is our reason for being. Whatever we decide is the nature of the fully functioning, self-actualizing individual must become at once the goal of education." [11]

Honor, integrity, devotion; together these virtues could transform our profession, could truly represent a "return to the basics," and could make of individuals, citizens, instilling in them an increased potential for leadership.

Footnotes

[1]Lindeman, E.C. (Ed.,1954), Basic Selections From Emerson, New York: The New American Library, p.59.

[2]See Rosenbaum, R. (1980), "Ross Perot to the Rescue", Esquire, December, 1980, p.62, or Gardner, J.W. (1984), Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?, New York: Norton, for further development of this point.

[3]Gardner (op cit) and Montessori, M.M. (1976), Education for Human Development, New York: Schacken Books, stress this point both from the perspective of our striving for excellence (which is not for everyone) and the failure of the schools to prepare us for this life.

[4]Read the introduction to Og Mandino's University of Success (1982, New York: Bantam Books) for a further development of this point.

[5]See Dyer, W. (1980), "Overcoming your mis-education" in The Sky's the Limit, New York: Pocket Books, p. 186.

[6]Gardner, op cit, p. 154

[7]ibid, p. 146

[8]ibid, p. 119

[9] Maslow, A.H. (1971), The Farther Reaches of Human Nature, New York: The Viking Press, p. 35.

[10] Lindeman, op cit, p. 42

[11] Combs, A.W. (1962), "What Can Man Become?", Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for Education, (1962 Yearbook), Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, p. 2.